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ABSTRACT

The experiences of young women in Victoria, Australia, who left school before completing their secondary education were examined to identify the issues facing female early school leavers and the policy implications of those issues. The study was based primarily on data from the Youth Research Centre's Disaffiliated Early School Leavers study, a longitudinal study of 132 early school leavers (including 57 young women) that began in 1990. Special attention was paid to the following topics: (1) pathways taken (employment, reliance on income support or family support, involvement in illegal activity); (2) participation in education and training (secondary school, SkillShare, technical and further education, apprenticeships, traineeships); (3) accommodations; (4) services and support received; (5) outcomes of postschool activities; (6) barriers encountered by female early leavers; and (7) early leavers' plans for the future. The young women's experiences were discussed from the following standpoints: their place in Australia's new education and training agenda; their transition to independent adulthood; and educational practices that can assist their transition (curriculum design, reentry, monitoring). The study documented the struggles of female early school leavers and confirmed that Australian schools must ensure that their curriculum provides for all girls and women, including those not on a "university track." (Contains 43 references.) (MN)

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EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Young Women and Girls at Risk

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Contents

Introduction 1

Why focus on early school leavers? 1
Young women at risk - the slow process of change 2
Which young women are at risk? 3

On the road to (no) where? - The experiences of 132 early school leavers in Victoria 7
Pathways 10
Employment 12
Income support 14
Unemployment benefits 15
Other benefits and pensions 16
Educational support 16
Family 17
Illegal 18
None 19
Education & training 21
Secondary school 21
Go back to school? No way! 23
SkillShare 24
Technical and further education 24
Apprenticeships 25
Traineeships 26
Accommodation 28
Services and support 30
Outcomes 31
Young women at risk 33
Plans for the future 35

Policy implications 37
Where do young women & girls fit in the new education & training agenda? 37
The transition to independent adulthood 39
Practice in schools 40
Curriculum 41
'Adult' practices and negotiation 41
Content and process of teaching 42
Student welfare 43
Re-entry 44
Monitoring 44

Conclusions 46

References 48

Introduction

The concept of 'at risk' serves as a shorthand to refer to the processes whereby some groups of young people are consistently disadvantaged by their outcomes from schooling. The Students at Risk Program for example, identified early school leavers as a group who are especially disadvantaged. This program sought to,

> identify those students in government schools most at risk of not completing secondary schooling and to encourage their continuing participation by supporting a range of school-based projects. (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1992: i.)

However, the term 'at risk' has relevance to a much wider group of young people than early school leavers. Many young people, including those who complete their post-compulsory years of secondary education, find themselves on a pathway towards marginal participation in the labour force. For these young people, establishing a livelihood and becoming independent are goals that are difficult to reach. Some groups of young women are particularly affected. For example, young women continue to take up jobs in a more narrow range of occupations than young men and to be more likely to rely on income support than men.

The concept of 'at risk' has use in referring to systematic processes whereby particular groups are disadvantaged in the outcomes from their schooling. The notion is most usefully employed with reference to the multiple processes of gender, ethnicity, class and race that affect the outcomes of specific groups of young people. However, it can be counterproductive if it is used to imply that there is a 'norm' from which 'at risk' students deviate.

This report focuses on the post-compulsory outcomes from schooling for young women. It draws mainly on the Youth Research Centre's "Disaffiliated Early School Leavers" study. Following the experiences of a group of young women who left school early, the paper explores the processes whereby some young women are marginalised during their post-school years, rendering them vulnerable and dependent. The experiences of these young women provide a vivid illustration of the issues facing early school leavers. These issues are of direct concern to teachers and other members of the school community because of their implications for the nature and quality of schooling in all its aspects, including the development of policies regarding school organisation and curricular issues, welfare and discipline frameworks.

Why focus on early school leavers?

Early school leavers are an important group of young people in our education system. This is because it is likely that, despite the increase in retention to Year 12, a significant number of young people will continue to leave school before completing post-secondary education. Unless senior secondary schooling meets the needs of these young people, it is likely that there will be an increase in early school leaving or, at best, the present levels will be maintained.

This group of young people poses a dilemma for schools. Their choice to leave early is most consistently based on a negative assessment of their experiences of school (Holden 1992; Holden & Dwyer 1992; Ainley 1985; Batten & Girling-Butcher 1981; Office of Youth Affairs 1978). Few leave because they have a clear post-compulsory education, training or employment 'pathway' mapped out after they leave school (Holden 1992; Holden & Dwyer 1992). They provide a clear message that the curriculum is not meeting their needs.

The question of the relationship between being 'at risk' and early school leaving is complex. There is clear evidence from a number of longitudinal studies (DEET 1987; DEET 1991; Bell, Rimmer & Rimmer 1992) that young people who do not complete Year 12 are more likely to be unemployed and for longer periods of time than their peers who remain at secondary school. Early school leavers are seriously disadvantaged because, in the current context of economic and workplace restructuring, their opportunities to establish independence are significantly limited. They are likely to be dispossessed of a meaningful future unless they can find a 'track' back into education or training. For them, the current rhetoric of 'pathways' through the post-compulsory years is empty. Their lack of educational credentials makes it difficult for them to gain access to the opportunities for employment which will ultimately secure their livelihood (Holden 1993; Holden & Dwyer 1992).

Young women at risk - the slow process of change

Nearly 20 years has passed since the significant report on girls' and young women's educational opportunities, *Girls, School and Society* (McKinnon 1975) provided official recognition of the unequal outcomes from schooling for young women and girls. At that time, one of the key indicators of educational inequality was educational participation to Year 12; young women were more likely to leave school early than were their male counterparts, and were subsequently disadvantaged in their post-school opportunities.

Today young women, as a group, are more likely to complete their post-compulsory secondary education than young men (Johnston 1990: 3). In addition, over the last two decades and particularly the last ten years, there have been a significant number of initiatives, programs and campaigns directed at redressing gender inequalities in educational experiences and outcomes. These are summarised by Kenway as

> a vast body of literature which includes at its extremes scholarly treatises and promotional material (stickers, brochures, posters), carefully developed curriculum packages and tips for teachers. (1993: 82)

There is evidence that these have had an impact in some areas. For example, it is apparent that young women's participation in maths, science and in higher education has increased, although recent research indicates that young women remain under-represented in science and mathematics subjects, and young men remain under-represented in the humanities (Johnston 1990; Teese, Polesel & McLean 1993).

However, despite the fact that the elimination of sexist language, practices and curriculum materials have been formal policy for several years, "in reality many of these practices and materials have been slow to

disappear from classrooms" (Johnston 1990: 23). The 1993 report of the Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education to the Minister for Education in Victoria comes to the same conclusion, commenting that despite some success

> in terms of what affects most girls most of the time - behavioural expectations, curriculum choice and equity in use of school resources - there appears to have been minimal change. (Elliott 1993: 3)

In other words, surprisingly little has changed in the broad pattern of outcomes of education for girls. This is reflected in the range of jobs young women take up as compared with young men. The persistence of inequalities in the workforce, in terms of where women work, what they do, their working conditions and the pay they receive indicate that the very issues which the 1975 Report took as its point of reference remain significant today. As Yates comments about the report *Girls, School and Society*,

> Its picture of different girls, and its adherence to 'non-sexist' critical rationality, may look somewhat naive in terms of the academic themes of the 1990s. But its themes have not been made redundant by later developments. What girls and boys should learn in schooling and just how schooling relates to the *social inequality* of women, are questions that need to go on being asked. (1993: 12)

Which young women are at risk?

It is clear that levels of participation alone provide a misleading indicator of educational equality. The increases in participation by some groups of young women and girls mask a persistent inequality in educational outcomes based on gender. The key features of unequal outcomes from education continue to be reflected in three areas.

a) The nature and quality of paid work in the labour market

The broad gender pattern is that young women's employment destinations continue to be within a narrower range of jobs and occupations than young men's. According to a recent report, Australia "has one of the most gender segregated workforces in the industrialised world" (Griffiths 1990: 31). One submission reported,

> Women are more likely to be in low paid jobs, without recognised qualifications and training and working on a part-time basis. Around 85 percent of women workers are concentrated in five main industries: community services, wholesale and retail trade, finance, property and business services and community service industries which have historically employed a high proportion of women. (1992: 31)

The Report comments that the tendency towards labour market segmentation is increasing in Australia.

Workplace and award restructuring offer the potential to have women's skills recognised. However, as these processes unfold, there is increasing concern that the old patterns of labour market segmentation will remain. Taking up this issue, Probert and Wilson (1993) point out that, despite changes to the workplace associated with the introduction of new technology and new work practices, women continue to be

segregated into limited areas of the workforce. These areas are characteristically lower paid, less secure and more short-term than those of their male counterparts.

b) The relationship between 'public and private' aspects of life - paid work

Women continue to carry a disproportionate burden of the unpaid work of caring for others, and tend not to be the recipients of caring work by others. The extent of women's unpaid work is related to their high representation in part-time jobs, and in jobs which do not require high levels of responsibility. There is, however, increasing attention being paid to the links between the 'private' and the 'public', for example, in the ways in which women's work responsibilities may mirror their actual or anticipated responsibilities as mothers and wives in the domestic sphere (Pringle 1988).

The implementation of work-based child care in some enterprises indicates an increasing awareness by industry of the need to acknowledge domestic responsibilities. The recognition of the integral links between paid and unpaid work is focusing attention on the very structures of work. Probert comments,

> Rather than calling for a return to the traditional goal of full employment, meaning 40 hours a week, we should be transforming the concept of 'normal work'. While considerable effort has been expended on creating conditions under which women can compete equally with men (the provision of child care, maternity leave, equal employment opportunity policies) insufficient attention has been paid to transforming the structure of men's work itself. (1994: 173)

The issue of sex-based harassment, once seen as a private issue, is now viewed as a public concern in schools and in the workplace. Far from being seen as a trivial personal matter, sex-based harassment is now understood as an invidious process which, if left unchallenged, serves to marginalise girls and women in schools and in workplaces.

c) The persistence of social division

The search for strategies which recognise and value the contribution and potential of girls and young women has inevitably lead to approaches which emphasise some of the key characteristics which women have in common. However, recent educational policy has begun to recognise that young women and girls are not a homogeneous group. Reports and policy documents now acknowledge the differences between groups of girls and young women - for example, see *A National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1986) and *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97* (Curriculum Corporation 1993). They note that young women's educational outcomes are affected by social and cultural factors such as socioeconomic background, ethnic background and race. These continue to be fundamental issues. Young aboriginal people are not at all well represented in the post-compulsory school years (Brady 1991) and urban-rural divisions are also significant (Quixley 1992).

Evidence that social division has a serious impact on the outcomes of schooling is provided by the 1993 report *Locational Disadvantage in Educational Attainment and Outcomes Project*. This project found that

educational attainment and outcomes from schooling were closely related to measures of socioeconomic status (based on labour force regions). For example,

> For every 100 students beginning secondary school in the North-West of Melbourne, only two in five survived attrition and program selection to enter the pool from which aspirants for university were drawn. But in the Inner-East, nearly four out of five secondary school students remained to compete for places. (Teese, Polesel & McLean 1993: 73).

The broad picture of retention to Year 12 and entry into post-compulsory education and training inevitably masks differences in the experiences of young women based on cultural background, place of residence, social class and race. The increasing numbers of young women currently entering tertiary education may reflect the 'privatisation of education' - a circumstance where the increasing private costs of education mean that socioeconomic status, as much as gender, is a factor in participation beyond the post-compulsory years (Teese, Polesel & McLean 1993).

These features of our society affect young women by limiting the choices they see for themselves and by creating barriers to their full participation. The processes whereby these patterns are produced are varied, complex and specific to particular contexts. In the following section, the paper explores the processes affecting the outcomes for young women who are early school leavers. It is common to see the problem of outcomes as one of the choices young women and girls are making, rather than putting them into the perspective of the systemic processes that operate against women's interests. It is not a question of one or the other, but both, and it is extremely important that, in continuing to develop strategies to improve the outcomes for young women, both are kept on the agenda.

On the road to (no) where? - the experiences of 132 early school leavers in Victoria

The following discussion focuses on the group of young women who are most seriously disadvantaged in their outcomes from schooling - early school leavers. They are disadvantaged because their direct entry into the labour market effectively reduces their options to gain secure, well paid work with career opportunities. The experiences of this group of young people show that the stakes are becoming higher, as early school leaving is increasingly associated with poverty, long-term unemployment and a narrow range of occupations.

The Youth Research Centre's longitudinal study of 132 early school leavers, begun in 1990, was based in three Victorian regions - St Kilda, Melton and Shepparton. In its first phase, it was funded by an Australian Research Council grant and for the remainder of the time was funded by the Students at Risk Program in the Victorian Directorate of School Education.

Of the original 57 young women interviewed, 51 were still in the study two and a half years later. Participants were interviewed, on average, every three months after the initial interview. Many of the participants had left in 1990, or were not considering returning to school in 1991. Others had left as early as 1988. The average length of time since leaving school (and taking part in the study) and the completion of the study was around 31 months for both males and females. The minimum and maximum time out of school of the young women was 18 and 57 months respectively. The young women in the study were aged between 14 and 18 years of age at the time of leaving school and were then from Years 9 through 12, with the majority being in Year 11.

The experiences of these young people are documented in four Youth Research Centre documents (see Youth Research Centre 1990; Holden & Dwyer 1992; Holden 1992; Holden 1993). These reports describe two significant aspects of the experience of these young people:

a) a majority left school because of the 'push' factor of a negative experience of school rather than because of the 'pull' of a good job or a clear concept of their future options (see Holden & Dwyer 1992).

"I've done nothing, achieved nothing. I have not done anything I wanted to, like going back to school. There have always been obstacles in the way - being pregnant, the baby's father, me moving out of home. I can't afford to go back to school now. I don't think I was meant to go. But, I would like to get my VCE one day."

"I've grown up a lot. I had to, being on my own. What with paying bills and things like that."

"I don't know what's in my future. Maybe to find a job and then eventually move out of home."

"I wouldn't go back to school. It's the teachers. I don't get on well enough with them. They're too pushy."

"In the middle of Year 11 a family member was sick and I took time off. I just couldn't catch up because it was VCE. If it had been a normal Year 11, I could have passed."

b) at the end of three years no clear pathways could be identified in their post-school options. Most young people 'managed' through a variety of strategies, moving from employment, to the support of family or friends, to income support and perhaps back to a period of employment (see Holden & Dwyer 1992).

In this paper the outcomes for the young women are described in comparison to the young men in the study. Those outcomes are based on personal interviews with the participants over a period of at least two years after they left school.

In terms of the reasons for leaving school initially, young women were more likely than young men to refer to negative experiences of the school culture and organisation as well as specific personal aspects. They also had greater external difficulties associated with health and family issues. They were more likely to leave school early because of school factors which included:

- the negative nature of their relationships with teachers;
- inappropriate curriculum and limited subject choices;
- worry about the impact of the, then newly instigated, Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) on their ability to successfully complete school;
- failure at school which meant the young women did not see the continuance of their education as a viable option.

Personal factors were also present, but less influential than were school related issues. Personal factors included:

- family related issues which affected their ability to continue on at school, specifically: family perceptions about the desirability of young women obtaining an education; difficulties within the home (violence towards the young person or other members of the family); lack of study facilities; and parental support;
- health issues that were related to the stress of schoolwork and particular physical illnesses.

In the face of a negative experience of school, the options for this group of young women were to remain at school and put up with the problems they had encountered, remain and try to accept or challenge the difficulties, or leave. The study has focused on those members of the school community who chose to leave.

After leaving school, both young men and women had five main options available to and taken up by them. These were:

1) family dependence;

2) employment;

3) income support (mainly social security benefits and educational support such as Austudy and Abstudy);

4) illegal activities (criminal activities as well as working for cash-in-hand);

5) no monetary or physical support (at times the young people would rely on savings they had accumulated during stints of work; at other times they would be living on nothing).

Initially, the majority of the young women were dependent on their family, while the remainder were employed, receiving either income or educational support, or receiving no income. By the close of the study the picture had changed dramatically.

At the last interviews, in late 1992 and early 1993, the majority of young women were receiving some kind of income support and the remainder were employed. In contrast to this, the young men were represented across the range of options. Table 1 summarises the young people's activities at two points in time: at the start and at the finish of the study. It suggests that there are broad similarities in the experiences of young women and men. However, this is misleading because viewing the data in this manner masks substantial differences in the experiences of young women and young men. By looking more closely at what the young people were doing in each of the identified categories during the duration of the study, it becomes evident that the experiences and outcomes for young women and young men are more complex.

"I think I really needed that break from school. I was so immature at the time. I've been out of school so long now. It's made me open up my eyes. Being in the workforce has taught me a lot about the real world. My friends who went straight through school and are finished now are so immature. They've been wrapped in cotton wool in their schooling. To be out there where you have to pay bills and earn a living, it opens your eyes."

"I think what I'm doing now will be a career. I wouldn't be in anything else and I wouldn't want to be. I want to retire by the time I'm 25 and travel. I intend to be one of the 5% of people [who own 95% of the wealth]. I don't want to be an average person with a mortgage and a car to pay off."

"Most employers now want experience more than anything else. I went for a job this week and they wanted a girl friday to do the bum work, and I wasn't experienced enough! They want somebody young and they don't want to train you."

Table 2 is concerned with the overall outcomes for young people. It describes the main options they took up over the duration of the study in terms of the percentage of time spent in each option. This broad picture also suggests that the patterns for young men and young women are fairly similar, with the exception of income support where young women were clearly more reliant than their male counterparts.

The way in which data was collected and recorded meant that each of the five categories could be considered more comprehensively and individual experiences over time could be collated. This allows for an examination of the extent to which young women take up identifiable pathways towards a goal, the impact of income support in its various forms, the issue of school and family support, and experiences of employment. The detail in each of the areas highlights the very different experiences of young women as compared to young men and is covered in the following discussion.

The tendency for research findings to be based on snapshots and broad sweep analyses of outcomes is significant, as it can obscure substantial differences in experience. This suggests that our understanding of outcomes from education needs to take account of the processes occurring over time, as well as at specific points in time.

Pathways

The patterns of activities amongst the study's participants reveals a gender-based difference in the pathways they followed. Only 9 of the young women in the study (17%) were exclusively on an employment pathway in comparison to 20 of the young men (30%). Whilst none of the young men was exclusively on an income support pathway, 3 of the young women (6%) had been mostly on unemployment benefits or sole parent pension since leaving school.

Of the remaining 39 young women, it was difficult to discern any clear patterns in terms of pathways. What was evident was a marked tendency to move between options and to gain little from attempts to return to school or take on further education. Movement between jobs also did not appear to reflect any cogent type of pathways. The link between jobs and further education was minimal.

Table 1 **Options for the first and last interviews of the study (% of participants)**

	Employed	Income Support	Dependent on Family	Illegal Activities	None
First	35	18	43	-	4
Female					
Last	49	51	-	-	-
First	39	10	48	3	-
Male					
Last	52	41	3	3	1

Table 2 **Summary of patterns of source of livelihood across the study (% of time spent)**

	Employed	Income Support	Dependent on Family	Illegal Activities	None
Female	44	34	18	2	2
Male	45	25	19	6	6
Total	44	29	19	4	4

"I'm looking for anything. I went to an interview the other day for a cooking job - and I hate cooking!"

"He told me he wouldn't employ a girl to be a mechanic. He said girls don't like to do that sort of stuff; he'd rather hire a guy."

"It's been difficult paying the rent and bills [since leaving home]. It's my own fault; I should have thought about the rent."

"I worked twice as hard as anyone else - I have to prove myself. It's still divided there. I didn't equal the farm boys. They're legends... It's a battle, starting at a new place all the time. You have to prove yourself before you're accepted. They wouldn't always let me do all the jobs. They'd say it was too hard for me. At [one place] they wanted a note from my trade school before they would let me use the chainsaw. I got to be on the front-end loader 10 hours in 8 months! Their excuse was that it was broken!...

Young women who were not in employment found it more difficult to gain access to and remain in the labour market. On the other hand, young men were able to move more easily between jobs and other options. They were able to spend varying amounts of time dependent on their families, receiving unemployment benefits or with no visible means of support before returning to the labour force or to education and training.

The greater needs of young women in terms of support when employed, unemployed or not in the labour force, is clear given some of the evidence from the study. Firstly, young women were more likely to be unemployed or employed in positions which did not provide an adequate living wage. The employed were invariably working in sectors of the labour market which do not offer job security or the chance for advancement or career development.

Young women were also more likely to be living independently of their parents and unlikely to return to the family home when their financial situation was weakened. Living away from home also increased their cost of living with the need to establish and maintain a place of residence.

Employment

The overall rate of employment (between 24 and 26%) of the sample remained fairly constant over the period of the study, as did the type of working conditions to which young people were subjected. They experienced a variety of situations in terms of the kinds of employment they obtained, their status as workers and their treatment within the workplace. They invariably had low rates of pay, meaningless work with few options for change or advancement and were subject to harassment and below award conditions.

Of the young people in the study, 103 (86%) of both the young women and men were employed at some time after leaving school. They were also in employment for similar percentages of time (49.5% for the young women and 47% for the young men). However, this similarity masks very different processes and experiences for young women and men in terms of their employment status and types of work undertaken. Of the

jobs that young women held, 32% were part-time in contrast to 19% of the jobs held by young men. Young women were also more likely to be entrenched in part-time positions, tending to stay in them almost twice as long as the young men (8.3 months compared to 4.8 months).

The spread of young women and men across the various types of employment also showed some clear differences (see Table 3). Nearly four out of every five, or 80%, of jobs held by young women were in the clerical and sales area compared to only one out of every three, or 30%, for young men. Apprenticeships were also less available to young women (13%) than they were to their male counterparts (41%). All but one of the young women were in hairdressing apprenticeships: a traditional occupation. The other young woman, who was an apprentice gardener, had experienced considerable difficulty not only in obtaining her position, but also in being allowed to carry out the range of tasks that were available to the young male apprentices with whom she worked.

Table 3 **Types of employment at time of last interview (%)**

	Apprenticeship	Clerical	Sales	Unskilled
Female	13	39	39	9
Male	41	3	27	29

All of the young women and men who obtained an apprenticeship were still employed in those positions at the close of the study. Embedded in this fact are the barriers and harassment that young women had to overcome and which were directly linked to negative views of women in the workplace. Apprenticeships were not the only settings in which young women were faced with this kind of struggle. These type of practices were endemic across the labour market as well as in the wider community. As an indication of the difficulty young women generally encountered in trying to gain access to employment pathways, only 5 of the young women (11%) had been employed continuously since leaving school as opposed to 10 of the young men (17%).

... The teachers [from trade school] wanted me to go straight to Equal Opportunity, but I didn't want to look like a trouble-maker. The other two girls they had were [seen as trouble-makers]. One was 'injured' thirty times in one year. She was called a slack worker. The other one was called a flirt. I stuck it out and hassled them."

"I was treated like a dog. I was only there to clean. I even cleaned their house. And I was employed as a sales assistant!"

"Work is trying to put me out because I'm going to be 18 soon. They've cut my hours; I'm too expensive because I'm getting older."

"I was harassed by a worker. I couldn't be bothered telling the boss [because nothing would have happened]."

"What I really don't like about them [DSS] is when you go in and complain and they act like its coming from their own money. They don't realise we all need money."

Added to this was the fact that young women were more likely to be in part-time positions and in sectors of the labour market which provide little in the way of job security and career prospects. A number of young women were working in 'on call' jobs, mostly in supermarkets, which meant they were told on a daily basis whether they would be working a busy shift. This made it difficult for them to seek other work and to feel autonomous about the 'free' time they had as they were unable to plan activities in advance.

Some of the young women working in sales and service were also concerned about the security of their jobs as they approached 18 years of age and would be eligible for adult wages. Young women, in both full- and part-time positions generally received lower wages than young men. Overall, the young women's experience of employment and the search for it were mostly negative.

Income Support

The income support options refers mainly to those times at which participants were in receipt of either a social security benefit or pension, or an educational support payment such as Austudy or Abstudy. The social security payments received by participants were: Unemployment Benefits; Job Search Allowance; Sole Parent Pension; Special Benefit; Sickness Benefit; and the Invalid Pension. Educational support payments were received by some of the young people returning to secondary school and some of those undertaking further and higher education.

Income support was a vital form of livelihood for large numbers of young people in the study. Ninety-two (77%) were in receipt of some form of income support during the study and 90 (75% of all the participants) received a social security payment. In approximately 5% of all the cases receiving unemployment benefits, the participants were earning money from part-time work and their social security payment was a 'top up'.

A large number of both females and males were in receipt of some form of income support during the study - 41 females (80%) and 52 males (75%). Young women were slightly more likely to spend time in receipt of income support (39%) than young men (33%) throughout the study.

18

Following this gender-based trend, young women were more likely to be receiving a social security payment - 42 young women (82%) as opposed to only 48 of the young men (70%).

Each of the types of income support will be discussed in turn.

Unemployment Benefits

Overall, 86 young people (72%) were in receipt of unemployment benefits at some time during the study. Young women were more likely to be in a less secure position, with 40 of them (78%) having been dependent on income support at some time, in contrast to only 46 of the young men (67%). There was also a difference in the average length of time that the participants were in receipt of unemployment benefits - 8 months for young women and 6 months for young men.

The issue of long term unemployment (LTU) (12 months and over at any one time) was also evident in the study. Young men were more likely than young women to be unemployed for long terms - 16 young men (38% of the total) as opposed to 12 young women (30% of the total). There were 7 young women who missed out on being included in the LTU category by around one month and when they are included the percentage of young women unemployed for 11 months and over is 48%. There were no young men to be included in this broadening of the category as the remainder of them were unemployed for significantly shorter periods of time.

Young women found the experience of being unemployed both limiting and testing. While there was acknowledgment that time was a ready commodity to someone who was unemployed, they felt that the freedom came at a high price - boredom - because most activities they were interested in required a certain level of financial input. Unemployment did not only generate problems that revolved around lack of activities and money.

Several young women were involved in complex, difficult and time-consuming negotiations with government departments in order to receive and remain on benefits. For these, and other young women, the negative perceptions of income support recipients by family members and the wider community were also a source of stress.

"I think I'm not getting the jobs because I've done nothing since I was unemployed. Four to five months ago I wanted to do a course about receptionist and office procedures, but the DSS wouldn't pay for it because I hadn't been unemployed long enough."

"The worst thing about being unemployed is being bored."

"I hate it. I'm home all day doing nothing. My friend works and I clean the house. I'd rather be working. I miss the money."

"The DSS are not very helpful. They treat you like a piece of dirt. Even now. When I went to apply for sole parent benefit they treated me like some sort of a hooker."

"There's been no problems with the DSS. Except I was underage when I was due with the baby. After I had her I couldn't claim nothing because I was underage. [My boyfriend] went to see the manager and it was okay."

"I tried saying I'd moved out of home [to get Austudy homeless allowance], but it's still based on dad's wage...

Other Benefits and Pensions

The differences in income support experiences were amply highlighted when social security payments other than unemployment benefits were reviewed. Only 2 of the young men (3%) had been in receipt of another benefit or pension, while this was the case for 9 of the young women (18%). This was mostly due to the fact that seven young women had children during the course of the study and all were receiving income support. Five had obtained the Sole Parent Pension and two were living with partners who were in receipt of the defacto/married rate of Unemployment Benefit. The remaining two young women were in receipt of Sickness and Special Benefit for short amounts of time. The two young men in this category were in receipt of Sickness Benefit and, while one was only in this situation for a short amount of time, towards the end of the study the other male had successfully applied for and received the Invalid Pension.

Five of the seven young women who became pregnant and gave birth during the course of the study were sole parents (the other two were living with the fathers who were receiving unemployment benefits). These young women invariably encountered problems in applying for the Sole Parent Pension, coping financially, and trying to enter or re-enter the education system or job market. Some found it hard to reconcile their views on motherhood with the expectations of those around them. In other cases, the young women were expecting to be reliant on family support to enable them to work.

Educational Support

At various times during the study, participants were receiving Abstudy or Austudy while they were returning to school or undertaking further education. The following numbers do not represent all young people studying during the course of the study. For example, many of those who returned to school did not apply for Austudy, especially the young men. Instead they lived at home and were dependent on their families.

Nine of the young women (18%) received educational support for an average of approximately nine months. On the other hand, only 9 of the young men (13%) received educational support for an average of 13 months. While four of the young men received support on more than one occasion, none of the young women did so. This highlights the fact

that young women were less likely to persevere at trying to gain access to an education.

It is also interesting to note that the young women did not receive support for a long enough time to finish a calendar's year of schooling. It appears that they were more likely to be in receipt of educational support because they were also more likely to not be living at home and financially dependent on their family. In this sense, the decision to return to the secondary education system and the ability to remain there were contingent on the fact that most of the young women were independent of their families and not receiving accommodation or financial support from them.

Family

The category of financial dependence on family refers to those times when young people were either living at home or with close relatives and not in receipt of any other kind of support, or living away from home and receiving financial support from their close or extended family. In most of the latter cases, they were living with relatives and receiving bed and board and, occasionally, 'pocket money' for personal spending.

For the 14% of time that young people were financially dependent on their families, they were eligible to receive a social security payment (most usually Job Search Allowance or Unemployment Benefit), but chose not to do so. Reasons for not applying for payments included feeling undeserving ("I haven't paid any taxes yet") or having been told of, or in the past experienced, problems when applying for benefits. There were issues surrounding the need to supply numerous documents for proof of identity, the amount of time it took to apply for and finally receive benefits and the negative manner in which people were treated by staff from the Department of Social Security.

Young women were less likely to be financially dependent on their family at some time during the study - 28 (55%) as opposed to 45 young men (65%) - although both were dependent for an average of seven months. During the study, young women spent 11% of their time dependent on their family, in contrast to young men who spent 16% in the same situation.

... If I really need something for school, dad'll get it for me if I ask - like money for the tram. I don't like asking for money. I'd rather work for it. You can't apply for a flat until you have an income to write down. And I couldn't have an income until I moved out of home."

"My parents are on my back all the time. My mum says, 'Why are you so slack?' I don't think they realise how hard things are these days. My mum thinks that if I really wanted to get a job I could go out and get one."

"If I had the money I wouldn't be living here now. There are big problems with living at home."

"Partly I moved for independence, but also there was a big argument with mum."

"I thought about trying for Youth Homelessness Allowance, but I didn't really have the guts to lie (and say I wasn't living at home)."

"I wouldn't have worked there if I wasn't getting the dole [too]. I finished paying off my car so I quit."

Differences also occurred in terms of the number of times the young people returned to a position of family dependence and the nature of household expectations and relationships when they were at home. Young women tended to be dependent for a fewer number of occasions, but for longer periods of time, whereas young men tended to regularly move out of and back into the family home. In a sense, once young women had left home they were unlikely to return, while young men tended to use their families as 'stop gaps' - leaving and returning home a number of times.

When financially dependent on the family, there was also a difference in the style of living between the sexes. Generally, young women were expected to contribute more to the household by way of responsibilities and chores and also to be answerable for the ways in which they spent their spare time. On the other hand, young men had more freedom afforded them in the way they spent their time and were less likely to be expected to work around the house.

Illegal

Two per cent of the young women found themselves in situations where they were either unable or unwilling to obtain any other kind of financial support, or were unable to obtain legally recognised work. At these times they resorted to some sort of illegal activity, mostly black economy activities, such as working for cash-in-hand as their sole means of income or while receiving unemployment benefits. As they did not receive any of the benefits usually associated with employment (e.g. training and job security) and generally did not mention the work they had been undertaking to a subsequent employer, this work has been designated under this heading rather than the 'employment' heading. Money from these activities was typically used to supplement income support benefits.

Young men were more likely to be involved in illegal activities - 9 (13%) in comparison to 3 young women (6%). Young men were also more likely to be involved in illegal activities for longer periods of time on average, for up to one year - three times longer than the female average of four months. Young men were also more likely to be involved in overtly criminal activities such as breaking and entering, and receiving stolen goods.

In an echo of the details associated with financial dependence on the family, all of the young women were only involved in illegal activities on one occasion while over half of the young men who were engaged in illegal activities did so on more than one occasion. Young women tended to use their under-the-counter payments to supplement social security payments, invariably unemployment benefits.

The majority of young women who were involved in illegal activities were unhappy about what they were doing, but they felt (especially those who could not obtain legitimate work) that they had few choices available to them. The young women often mentioned the high degrees of stress they experienced because they worried about the consequences should they be found out.

None

While for some of the time young people resorted to illegal activities to make ends meet, at other times there were participants who were not receiving any form of financial support. In all, the 15 young people constituted 13% of the study's participants.

Instances of no income occurred for a number of reasons. In some cases, the young person was eligible for a social security payment, but chose not to take up the option. This occurred most especially when the young person was eligible for unemployment benefits, but believed, or was led to believe by a prospective employer, that employment would be forthcoming. Movement between jobs meant that participants could be without support for some weeks. There was also a tendency for young people to leave a job and expect to obtain further employment almost immediately. When another job did not materialise within a month or so, the participants would move on to another form of support.

A surprising number of young people were not in the labour force, receiving income support or dependent on their family. Young women were less likely to be receiving no income or support. Only 3 young women (6%) were in this situation for an average of 1.6 months as opposed to 12 young men (17%) who did so for around 4 months. Less than 1% of the young women's time was spent without income, compared to 2% of the young men's time.

"The DSS gave me the run around quite a bit. I was supposed to be on Sickness Benefits for 8 weeks, but they didn't pay me. They said the paperwork hadn't gone through. I don't know when the medical certificate ran out; they had it. The doctor had seen me during that time. They still sent me forms for a month. I rang them and told them what was going on, and they said I must have spoken to the wrong person."

"I moved out of home with my best friend [into a bedsit]. We did really well for a while, kept the bills going. Then the others moved in. Between five people you'd think we'd get it together to pay $85 a week rent. We all drove each other insane. I just dropped everything and walked out and went back to mum."

It is interesting to note, that while young men were more likely to be dependent on their families, they were also more likely to have no form of support for larger amounts of time than young women. This may be partly attributed to the fact that they tended to receive higher wages than young women when they were employed (legally or illegally) and were more able to put money aside for times when they were without income or support.

During times of no income or support the young people either relied on savings they had put aside while working or 'dossed' with friends and the family of friends until they returned to the workforce or applied for income support.

The young people had many reasons for being without income. Those who had previously been working and accumulated some savings felt that it was inappropriate for them to apply for unemployment benefits when they had funds available to them in the form of their savings. This situation was common in Shepparton, where moderately well-paid seasonal work would allow a young person to save money during times of employment. Others, especially those who had been retrenched or sacked, were sure that further work was imminent and preferred to subsist on no money for a few weeks rather than undergo what they saw as the indignity and time-consuming activity associated with applying for Unemployment Benefits.

Education & Training

Some of the young people in the study returned to secondary school to upgrade their educational qualifications in the hope of obtaining a better job. Others decided to return to school because they were unemployed and saw school as a release from boredom. Most returned to their old school. Participants in the study also undertook TAFE and SkillShare courses. Both the young women and men usually obtained their information about courses from family and friends. Very few were told about courses by the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) or other relevant services.

Apprenticeships and traineeships were other forms of training in which some of the study's participants were involved. The desire to obtain an apprenticeship was often mentioned by non-apprenticed participants, pointing to the fact that, while many of them were oblivious to many of the workings of the labour market, they were aware of the fact that apprenticeships are equated with job security.

Each of the education and training options are examined in this section of the report.

Secondary School

During the study some of the participants chose to return to school to further or complete their secondary education. The two main reasons for returning to school were associated with the depressed youth labour market. Some of the young people had difficulty in obtaining employment in their chosen field because they lacked the minimum level of schooling required by employers, while others, who were unemployed, were forced back to school by what they saw as the boredom and uselessness of their situation.

Of the 32 young people (27% of all participants) who returned to school, most went back to their old school. A small number attended some alternative form of schooling, most usually TAFE.

The return to school presented difficulties for most of the young people as they encountered both old and new problems. When they returned to school, the negative aspects of the school culture were invariably still present - rules and regulations, and the lack of autonomy and responsibility which had driven them to leave initially. The difference

"I knew a lot of the people at the school anyway when I went back. They were younger, but not that much. Age doesn't really matter if you're there to learn. I was really keen to get ahead. The others were mucking around."

"I went back because I hadn't even finished Year 9. I had no qualifications for anything. I wasn't willing to go into a shit job and there was nothing around."

"I used to fit in really easy at school. Now I can't fit in, it's the age difference."

"It's a difficult situation, going back. It hits you hard about the work, not having been at school for a while."

"I was going to go back to school in August 1991. I talked to the pastoral teacher, they had a meeting and said no, I was a troublemaker."

"I really don't know why I left school (again). I lost my confidence and thought I couldn't do it; I'd fail."

in age and maturity between the young women and other students was also felt as an additional pressure.

Nineteen young men (28%) re-entered the secondary education system while 13 young women (26%) did so. Both groups were more likely to leave again without successfully completing their secondary education - 15 young men (79%) and 11 young women (85%).

Some of the problems that young women encountered when they returned to secondary schooling caused them to leave again. These included:

- late re-enrolments which meant limited subject choices;
- negative reactions from school staff, some of whom offered little encouragement or support;
- lack of support within the school, based on a lack of acknowledgement or under playing of the difficulties returning students faced;
- inadequate financial support;
- troublesome classroom and schoolyard dynamics associated with the age discrepancy between the young women and other students;
- finding school and the curriculum even less relevant after being out of school for some time and attempting to establish themselves as independent adults.

Seven young men (37%) completed Year 12 as opposed to three young women (23%). At the close of the study, one young woman was intending to undertake Year 12 during 1994. Her ability to achieve this goal was likely to be severely hampered by the fact that she had to work a number of part-time jobs during the previous year to provide financially for herself, and her father (who provided her with lodgings) was intending to move interstate in 1994.

Importantly, both young women and men were more likely to return to school if they were living at home. However, given the finding that young women were more independent and less reliant on family support than young men, it is obvious that they were disadvantaged in terms of their ability to return to secondary schooling.

Of the 6 young men who completed their secondary schooling, half went on to tertiary study and the others were in employment at the end of the study. Only one of the 3 young women who completed their schooling went on to tertiary study. Of the other two, one was working part-time and studying at TAFE and the other was unemployed.

Two of the young women who had children returned to school - one while pregnant and the other as a mother. In the first case, the school offered ample support and encouragement, but even with this the young woman found the physical and psychological stress associated with being pregnant whilst at school difficult to endure, and left again. In the second case, the young woman received little or no support from the school. She received no help with child care and had to rely on friends to baby-sit. A month after returning she too left school again.

Go back to school? No way!

Many of the 86 young people (73%) who had not returned to school since leaving were adamant about not returning in the near or distant future. For some, this decision was based on their initial experience of the school system. They felt that school had little to offer them and was not worthwhile in terms of their future employment prospects. Still others were concerned about their age in relation to other students at school. This comment was especially frequent from the young women. They were more likely to feel that life experience and their maturation after leaving school presented a divide between themselves and other school students as well as a lessened ability to accept the restraints and impositions placed upon them by school structures.

But even some of those young women who were reticent about returning to school, stated they would like to continue their secondary schooling. In these cases, their desire to return was contingent on some changes or adjustment to procedures within the existing education system. These included:

- part-time and night classes available within secondary colleges;
- part- and full-time senior classes held in community and TAFE colleges;
- correspondence classes;

"I had to cope full-time with [my son]. My flatmate baby-sat during the day. There was no help from the school and I didn't get extra Austudy. It was good though; the other students loved the mother bit."

"I wouldn't risk losing my job to go back to school. My friends finished school and I'm in a better position. There's no guarantee of a job when you finish school."

"No, I just can't handle teachers."

"SkillShare was really good, probably because I did really well. It gave me back so much self esteem - going in, doing something and doing well."

"I did a SkillShare retail and typing course. It helped me to get the job I've got now."

"I got interested in [the TAFE] art course when a friend of mine was doing a big poster thing for the Yothu Yindi concert down here."

- curricula in all settings that are relevant to the young women as adult members of the community.

SkillShare

Five young people (4% of all the participants) were involved in a SkillShare course during the study. Young women and men were equally as likely to have done a SkillShare course - 2 young women (4%) and 3 young men (4%), but there was a discrepancy in the kinds of courses that were undertaken by the two groups. Young women were more likely to be found in courses that were service and sales oriented (computer skills, reception and retail) while the young men were involved in the fields of retail and hospitality (as in bar work). As can be seen from the areas of study, all were in areas of the labour market where occupations are characterised by a lack of job security, low levels of training and low wages.

All the young women who took part in SkillShare courses completed them, as did the young men. At the completion of the study, none of those who were unemployed at the time of studying were able to obtain employment in the field in which they had studied or any other type of employment.

The small amount of uptake of SkillShare courses seemed to be due to a lack of information rather than anything else. Young people who had not been involved in a SkillShare course either did not know about the possibility of taking a course or, if they did know about them, were unaware of how to gain access to the courses. A small number of participants who had been offered courses were either unhappy with the choices available or did not feel ready to take on any further education or training at the time.

Technical and Further Education

Seventeen young people (14%) undertook a TAFE-based course during the study. More young women than men chose to take up this option - 10 young women (20%) as opposed to 7 young men (10%). Courses were undertaken as a means of brushing up on existing skills, of acquiring new work-related skills and of acquiring new skills which would make the young person a more attractive employment prospect.

The young women's choice of courses was less wide-ranging than those of the young men, but the young women were more likely to choose non-traditional areas. While most of the young women chose fairly traditional study areas (child care, fashion, office-oriented and service), there were a few who undertook courses that were slightly outside of the usually accepted gender traditions (e.g. business management and a customs course). On the other hand, while the young men did undertake a wider range of courses, they tended to choose within the confines of subject areas traditionally designated as 'male' - for example, trade, business and technical courses.

Half of the young men and women who did a TAFE course completed them. Almost two out of every five left before completing. The remainder of young people who had begun TAFE courses were still enrolled in them at the completion of the project.

The young women's reasons for not completing a TAFE course were mostly based on the fact that they were either unaware of the prerequisites for courses or not given an accurate picture of the entry levels of courses when they were enrolling. So, while some felt that the courses they were doing were too simplistic and did not take into account the notion of recognition of prior learning, others found their courses too hard. This latter group found they had insufficient study skills to cope with the range and amount of work required. They felt this deficiency was due to the fact that they had been out of a learning environment for too long and had lost their previous skill levels. In these cases, they felt it would have been better if they could have taken a preliminary course which developed their study skills and provided coping strategies for fitting study commitments into their lives.

The issue of combining study and other commitments was especially relevant to the young women, given their propensity to have greater and more diverse types of family and home-based responsibilities.

Apprenticeships

At the completion of the study, 18 young people (representing 13% of the total participants) had started apprenticeships. The nine young people who moved into apprenticeships immediately after leaving school have been documented in an earlier work (see Holden 1992).

"All I really wanted was a certificate so I could get a job. I didn't really learn anything I didn't already know."

"[The business course] was okay, but it's not relevant to the work. It's designed for 16 year olds and everyone is 18 and over, so it's very basic."

"I should have done an advanced course. I knew it all."

"It was harder at school than it was before. It's just the way the work's set out; it's done differently. I just left."

"I want to complete my apprenticeship and be a good hairdresser. I want to complete at least two years with these people. I'm not very good at routine. I'm saying 'Yes, yes' to two years; just looking ahead two years."

"Once I finish the apprenticeship, I might try a different salon. Out of Melton. For something different."

"I'd like to stay on after the traineeship. You can get into different areas with the company. There is a lot of room for advancement."

Only three females (6% of the total number of females) had obtained an apprenticeship while males were over five times more successful in this area. Fifteen males (22%) obtained an apprenticeship. Two of the young females were employed as hairdressers, a traditional female occupation, but the third female was training to be a gardener. Some of the other females registered strong interest in non-traditional trade areas such as mechanics, but had met with discriminatory attitudes when they applied for these type of positions.

Young women were equally as likely as young men to continue their apprenticeships. Of the total number of apprenticeships that were begun, one (5%) was completed and the participant is working as a tradesman, fifteen (71%) were still in progress, four (19%) ended in retrenchment, and one (5%) quit because of unsatisfactory work conditions.

The young woman who discontinued her hairdressing apprenticeship within its first year did so because she felt that she was not receiving adequate supervision and had clashed with the manager on a number of occasions. A year later, she had obtained another hairdressing apprenticeship and was committed to its continuance.

Traineeships

One young female began a traineeship immediately after leaving school. At the conclusion of the study, only five additional traineeships had been undertaken. In all, this represented 5% of the total number of participants.

In contrast to the apprenticeships, most of the traineeships were obtained by females. Of the total of six traineeships, there were five female trainees (10% of the total females) and one male trainee. The young women were training in diverse areas, including public relations, clerical, and dental nursing. The young male from Shepparton undertook a retail traineeship while working for his father.

Most of the young women found their traineeships useful. They spoke of a high degree of consistency between what they were learning in classes and the knowledge and tasks required in the workplace. They also appreciated the support they received from tutors. Most were hopeful of remaining at their place of work at the completion of their traineeship.

Two of the young women completed their traineeships, one was still in progress at the end of the study and the other two left because of problems with the type of subject matter and the level of knowledge required. This highlights the point made earlier about the need for course prerequisites to be explained more fully to potential students.

"I really want to do the mechanics course at Footscray for women in non-traditional trades."

"If my boy-friend opens up the shop I'll have a job. I'll probably do a course then because I'll be able to afford it. If you do a hairdressing course then you get a certificate. Then you need experience. With the certificate I could probably get an appren-ticeship easier. I'm also saying that if I haven't got a decent job by the time I'm eighteen, I'll become a prison officer or a policewoman."

"It was okay when I first moved back home. I'd rather live out on my own, but I can't afford it."

"I have a couple of friends and an aunt down here [in Melbourne]. I keep in contact with mum and dad. It's difficult getting around. I know how to get from home to work and back and to Werribee [for shopping] and Shepparton."

"I want to work in the city and meet more people. There's more jobs and more opportunities."

Accommodation

While the forms of support available to young people had important consequences for the type of accommodation they could obtain, the type of accommodation they were in could equally affect the type of activities they were able to undertake. During the study, it became obvious that young women were less likely to return to school, not only because they were hesitant about the school culture, but also because they were less likely to be living in the family home and, therefore, did not have access to some of the financial, physical and emotional support that was available to the young men who were living at home and re-entering secondary school.

Overall, the most prevalent form of accommodation in which young people were living was in the family home (54%). It should be noted that this type of living situation did not always indicate that arrangements were congenial between the young person and other family members. Many of the young people were constrained in their choice of living circumstances by their lack of finances. When the instances of young people living with extended family were added, the number living with either close or extended family jumped to 63%. Reasons for living with extended family were typically based on an inability to get along with more immediate family members or the fact that the extended family lived closer to the young person's place of employment or study.

At 15%, the next most common form of housing was sharing rental accommodation with friends. Most of the young women who were in this situation were renting in the private market and very few had access to or knew about their eligibility for public housing. The length of the waiting periods for people applying for public housing tended to discourage those participants who had given it some consideration.

Twelve per cent of all the participants had been in a live-in relationship at some time - 11 young women (22%) and 3 young men (4%). In these cases, the couple were more likely to be (in descending order): living with only each other; living together and sharing with others; and living together in their partner's family home. In the latter situation, all of the participants were female and living with their boyfriend's family.

Of the remaining forms of accommodation, in 7% of the situations the young person lived alone, invariably in private rental accommodation

and, in the other 4%, the young person was in a share situation with people who were not known to them before.

At the time of the last interviews, 22 young women (43%) were living in their family home in contrast to 43 young men (62%). Over the life of the study, only 6 young women (12%) had never left the family home while 29 young men (42%) had remained at home. When young women did leave home they were much more likely to make a clean break and not return and they also tended to make larger moves away from the family home, moving from the country to Melbourne and from Victoria to interstate locales. As stated earlier, young men tended to leave from and return to the family home a number of times.

Different types of accommodation were also indicative of different kinds of lifestyles. Young women were less likely to be living at home because they were more likely to be in a relationship and living with a partner at some time during the study (22% as opposed to 4% of the young men). On the other hand, young women were less likely to be living alone.

Young women's experience in the rental market was limited by their ability to obtain properties. A bias by owners and estate agents towards families as occupiers of rental accommodation was the major limitation. The misgivings of these two groups were based on their belief that share-households of young people would be unstable when it came to paying the rent and maintaining the properties. This meant that young women were not always able to obtain properties or, at least, not in their own right. On a number of occasions, they had to have a parent or guardian act as a guarantor for them when signing a lease.

Both young women and men tended to move between places of residence the same number of times. But, given the propensity for young men to remain at home, they tended to move more often after leaving the family home. This reflected the greater priority that young women placed on becoming independent of their families.

Even though young women were constrained by their lack of job security, low wage levels and marked dependence on income support, they were much more likely than young men to be establishing themselves independently of their families. A significant number of young women were setting up their own households with either partners or friends.

"I didn't have time to worry about moving to Melbourne. I haven't made many friends yet; I'll have to join a gym or something. The people in Melbourne have been a culture shock. I don't feel able to go out by myself at night - not even to get milk or anything."

"I found living together didn't work out. Living under each other's feet wasn't any good. We were arguing. We just seemed to argue. I think I may be a bit young to live with someone now."

"When I left Shepparton I lost all my faith and trust in the [supported accommodation]. They tried to put out to me that I had a drinking problem. I wouldn't listen. I'm not really happy with them. I think they've got no balls. When I came back they thought I was how I was when I left. They said 'Yeah, stick around, come to meetings and we'll get you in [to supported accommodation]. We'll ring you'. They never rang."

Services and Support

During the study, many young women found themselves in situations were they needed help or advice or were statutorily obligated to use particular services (e.g. those on Unemployment Benefits who had to deal with the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service). Young people were asked regularly about their use of services and supports, which were defined within the study as,

> any organisation (government and non-government, statutory and voluntary) that young people used to maintain or enhance aspects of their lives including income support, employment, education, training, accommodation, welfare and personal development. (Holden 1993: 7)

A large percentage of all young people in the study made use of some sort of service with only 12 (10%) not using any. Males and females were almost equally likely to use services (88% as opposed to 90%). The main types of services used by young women were health or education oriented. These included general practitioners and local hospitals, and TAFE colleges. Males tended to use services sooner after leaving school. During this time, young women tended to rely on family, friends and themselves rather than use services.

Young Koori women and those from non-English speaking backgrounds used services more regularly, but used fewer numbers of services. Young women from English speaking backgrounds were the least likely of all young people to make use of services.

Young women and men found many government services inadequate. They expressed dissatisfaction with their treatment by staff which they felt was predicated on assumptions staff had about their eligibility for services and support. They also found many of the youth services to be both male dominated and oriented in terms of the gender of staff and the inclusion of programs and activities that mostly catered to male interests.

Young women's low usage of services is of concern given the fact that they were more likely than young men to be dependent on income support and low income levels.

Outcomes

All of the young people in the study found it difficult to find a consistent pathway which would help them to achieve their goals. In this broad sense, the outcomes for young women and young men are similar. All found school re-entry difficult and employment seldom offered the kind of long-term, secure and interesting jobs they would have liked, while exploitation in the workplace was common. Accommodation was a constant problem for many, and almost all were reliant on income support at one time or another.

However, the processes followed by young women and men as they negotiated common issues were very different. The young women emerged as doubly disadvantaged because once they left school they were much more likely to have to rely on their own resources than were the young men. A highly vulnerable group, this placed them in a position where school re-entry was practically impossible for many, where inferior jobs were attractive in the short-term and income support was a likely outcome.

While Table 1 showed how the overall outcomes for young women and men appeared to be fairly similar (apart from the greater dependence of young women on income support), analysis of their aspirations and outcomes highlights a gender-specific difference. As Table 4 indicates, young women were more likely than young men to choose goals that were limited to stereotyped occupational areas. Partly because their choice was so limited, young women were more likely to fulfil their stated goals.

While the young women tended to achieve outcomes that were consistent with their aspirations, the young men, who overwhelmingly aspired to an apprenticeship, were slightly more spread across occupational areas. Both groups display a traditional, gender-based approach to their ideas about future job prospects, and their outcomes reflect this bias.

On the face of it, the fact that young women tended to achieve their aspirations would appear to be a positive outcome, but it must be remembered that the majority of young women's aspirations were limited to a narrow band of occupations. It would be inappropriate to say that

"I think I would leave school all over again. I really needed that break to realise how important school was. I needed to get out there and find out how hard it was to get a job."

"I regret not doing Year 12. I would have only been un-employed for six months now and not eighteen months."

"I'm looking to marriage. I'm still looking for a job because we want to save up for a house."

"It's been a really big lesson for me. I've learnt that things don't always go your way. School is like a cover. It's like insulation from the big wide world. You don't really know anything until you leave and try and make it on your own."

"I'd like to get a nice job, a full-time secretarial job."

"I hope music will be my future. I just want to be a guitarist in a band. That's all I care about, though I'll probably still have to work."

young women's options were only limited by their interests. Instead what should be questioned is the range of options that young women are exposed to in school and other settings, and the viability of them gaining access to the full range of available options.

Table 4 **Aspirations versus Outcomes (%)**

	Apprentice-ship	Clerical	Sales	Unskilled	Professional/ Further Education*
Aspire Female	15	38	40	4	3
Attain	12	36	36	8	8
Aspire Male	63	4	10	10	13
Attain	39	3	24	26	8

*This grouping is made up of the young people who aspired to a professional occupation on first leaving school and those who, at the time of the study's close, were involved in some sort of further education that will lead to a professional or paraprofessional qualification.

These findings generate further concerns about the employment prospects of young women. Their vulnerability was heightened by their location in a narrow sector of the labour market, in occupations that do not offer job security or career opportunities.

In addition to this, the later young men left school, the more positive was their final outcome, while there was no link between the type of outcome and the young women's level of education. This meant that, for this group of young people, increased educational participation had a much more positive result for young men than for young women. This finding raises questions about the meaning of increased educational participation to Year 12 for young women.

Despite these outcomes, most of the young women were positive about their time since leaving school. They valued the maturation they have achieved since leaving school, and felt that school would have limited their progress in this respect. They placed a higher priority on learning to survive in the adult world than on finding and maintaining employment or education per se.

Young women at risk

The post-school experiences of the young women in the study have been markedly different from those of the young men in many ways. Their reasons for leaving school generally emphasised the role young women have traditionally been expected to play in the family and in the wider community. They often based their choice to leave on their estimation of the relationships they had with others (especially teachers) or on the impact relationships (especially those within the family) had upon them.

Their experiences of work were also different from those of their male counterparts. They found it harder to obtain employment and when they did, they worked fewer hours than they wanted, in a limited range of jobs, for lower wages. Their experiences within the workplace were marked by entrenched notions about their capabilities and the 'place' of young women in the workforce.

The corollary of young women's desire to establish and maintain a life independent of their families, is greater dependence on income support and, at the same time, a likelihood of using support services less than young men. When this is coupled with a higher incidence of living independently, and mostly renting in the private rental market, young women found it more difficult to both consider returning to school or go on to further education, and to complete their education. In terms of their ability to return to secondary school, young women were faced with a catch-22 situation: their increasing independence made it hard for them to go back to school; and, if they did return, their increasing maturity made it difficult for them to remain.

The experiences of these young women give impetus to the suggestion that the concepts of outcomes and pathways need to be reviewed. Given these findings, it appears inappropriate to talk only in terms of

"It's a sort of catch 22 situation. Everybody keeps saying stay at school. But, maybe you are better off if you leave early. I'd have a better chance of getting a job because of my experience. I believe in education as well. Where I work now, I see people [straight out of school] applying for jobs and they just don't know, they have no idea. I've learned so much and I'm only 19. I learned so much at school that was so irrelevant."

"I can't do animal technology. They only take year 12. If I don't get in I don't know what I'm going to do. My sister's been doing remedial massage in Sydney and maybe I'll do that. I've been let down too many times applying for courses. If I was 30 years old and had a 10 year old [instead of being 20 years old with a 2 year old], things would be different."

employment, education and training when discussing their pathways. The young women themselves, while concerned with education, employment and training, had an outlook that emphasised equally the other aspects of their lives including: independence from their family; establishment and maintenance of a home for themselves and their family; and other personal dimensions.

Whilst the outcomes in this study were not necessarily positive, some of the young women were able to achieve significant results in terms of establishing themselves on employment, education and training pathways, although they tended to be in traditionally feminised sectors of those systems.

Unfortunately, specific barriers stood in the way of the majority of the young women achieving such outcomes. Most of the young women who had taken on the traditional role of motherhood faced difficulties in entering and remaining in the labour market and education and training systems. Young women who were dependent on income support also come up against barriers when trying to access these systems and pathways.

Plans for the future

Four main themes emerged in discussions with the young women about their futures. The diversity of the themes emphasises the notion that young women are not an homogeneous group and, therefore, a multiplicity of approaches are needed to address the issue of inequity and their 'at risk' status.

Some of the young women who were well established upon a particular pathway were confident of achieving their goals, although they still had to contend with barriers to their full participation. Others were more concerned with adopting the traditional roles of wife and mother, although most in this group had yet to take on these roles. A third group had specific goals that they had been unable to achieve. For these young women, barriers had limited or prevented them from participating in the employment, education and training sectors, but they lived in hope of doing so in the future. The remainder of the young women had difficulty envisaging what their future would or could be like. Their marginalisation was a complex matter, but was exacerbated by the fact that systemic processes had ensured that they personalised their 'failure'. These young women not only saw their future as hopeless, but also their present.

The experiences of these young women indicate that the articulation between compulsory education and post-compulsory options is a long way from offering real pathways towards achieving a livelihood. Furthermore, the perspectives presented here suggest that an understanding of young women's lives needs to be more central in the development of pathways through employment, education and training. At present, systematic barriers constrain and limit young women in their attempts to achieve independent status.

"I'll take things as they come. I haven't really thought about the future. I'm going to go back and do social work - you have to be 22 or something like that. I want to help kids. I've had social workers and I've just sat there and laughed - not to their faces. Some of them are just reading out of a text book. I'd be better because of the experiences I've had."

"I don't really know. I'm taking it as it comes. I don't see myself as one of those people who can plan their life five years ahead."

Policy Implications

Where do young women & girls fit in the new education & training agenda?

The experiences of young women who leave school early provide a key reference point for the restructuring of the education and training system over the next decade. Their perspectives and experiences provide a clear message regarding the content and processes of schooling. Clearly, the young women were poorly informed and badly equipped to negotiate the realities of life beyond school. Ironically, their priority on learning about 'real life' would seem to be compatible with aspects of the new education and training agenda, with its emphasis on equipping young people to contribute more fully to Australia's restructuring economy.

The tenor of recent educational policy (Finn 1991; Carmichael 1992; Mayer 1992) is aimed at creating a workforce which is skilled, productive and internationally competitive (Employment & Skills Formation Council 1992). As Taylor and Henry argue,

> This is a complex and ambitious policy agenda, seeking to integrate aspects of industry, social and educational policy, nationally via schooling, TAFE and higher education sectors, the private training providers and within industries, occupations and workplaces. (1992: 15)

However, educationalists have pointed out that a serious tension lies in the extent to which this policy framework approaches inequality. Taylor and Henry comment that policy does little to redress the "deeply classed nature of work, training and education" (1992: 16). Both of these issues are fundamental to the development and implementation of education and training policies which address the needs of early school leavers and of young women particularly.

With this in mind, many educationalists argue that the study of work should be an integral aspect of the post-compulsory curriculum. Freeland for example, argues that both public and private work (that is, paid and unpaid) should be studied. As he comments,

> most official attempts to make schooling in general and the post-compulsory curriculum in particular more relevant to the world of work have focused almost exclusively on the relationship between school and employment. Even more narrowly, they have focused on attempts to fine tune schooling to the demands of employers, with particular emphasis on those students considered to be at risk in the transition from childhood dependence to adult independence. Similarly, much of the education sector's hostility to the study of work in the curriculum has been based on a strong hostility to narrow instrumentalism in the context of an unequally divided and segmented labour market. (Freeland 1992: 67-68)

Poole's study of the relationship between education and work also emphasises the importance of a broad general curriculum in which young people are empowered to question the meaning of work in their own lives, and to understand the social, historical and cultural processes which have shaped the development of society, so that they may become involved in the negotiation of the future (1992: 238).

Similarly, Batten stresses the importance of a post-compulsory curriculum which reflects a breadth of studies, a stress on process as much as content and the insistence on student participation and student cooperation rather than competition. She adds that it is important to foster personal as much as academic development (Batten 1992: 164). The research evidence from the young women early school leavers suggests that a curriculum with this emphasis would have been appreciated and would have been likely to assist many of the early school leavers to remain at school.

The issue for educationalists is how the curriculum can have relevance for the transitions young people make to independence. A key question is: can the needs of groups such as early school leavers be balanced with the perspectives of employers in shaping the agenda for post-compulsory education and training? The answer to this lies in decisions about the content of post-compulsory schooling, the processes of schooling and in the measurement of outcomes. Some of the complexities of this are illustrated by the issue of the measurement of skills through competencies.

Butler and Connole (1992) have pointed out that discussions of the national training reform agenda since the Finn Report (1991) have consistently focused on the importance of interpersonal skills for the workplace. The recognition of interpersonal skills is central to women's struggle to have their skills in the workplace recognised. However, the emerging competency standards and competency-based training tends to be couched in terms of reductionist, technical and impersonal requirements that render women's skills invisible (Connole 1993: 8). The lack of full recognition of interpersonal skills in the workplace will continue to place women at risk of being undervalued and will perpetuate their lower rates of pay.

A further question is: what should boys and girls learn in schooling, and how should schooling relate to the social inequality of women? This is an important issue as the workplace itself is an important site for the maintenance and creation of gender divisions (Cockburn 1991). From the point of view of young women, the opportunity to understand these processes through the study of work at school is essential. Unless these issues are addressed in their education, we will not necessarily see a dramatic change in women's place in the labour market, despite relatively high retention rates for young women.

The recent report *Listening to Girls* (Milligan 1992) takes up this issue by focusing on the questions young women are now asking of their education, particularly around the issues of the extent to which education address the realities of their adult lives.

As Yates and others reviewing the progress made towards equal opportunity, equal outcomes and affirmative action for girls and young women in Australian schools and in other countries, comment the proliferation of policies and legislative commitments, projects and conferences on gender and education are not necessarily a sign that progress has been made. Yates (1993) argues that change has not been incremental and cumulative, and that legislative and policy initiatives have been easily marginalised or trivialised. While policy and legislation are fundamental to the goal of moving beyond the inequalities of gender

division, we can see that with hindsight, these can only provide a base from which teachers and others in the education profession engage in the work of providing a post-compulsory curriculum which serves the needs of all young people.

During the last decade, many teachers have gained a thorough and intimate knowledge of the issues discussed here, and the ways in which they have an impact on the young women and young men in their own school and community. Sex-based harassment, for example, is now regularly dealt with at a school level, through the development of school policy and through local practice. The issue of single-sex classes has been thoroughly tested, and many schools now routinely operate variations of single-sex classes for a variety of reasons which make sense in the local context.

The evidence from this study indicates that the implementation of educational policy in schools needs to continue to focus on fundamental aspects of young women's experience, taking issue with the enduring nature of inequality, with the full extent of the transitions young people face as they move towards independence, and with the nature of the pathways that will increase their likelihood of achieving independence in their own terms.

The transition to independent adulthood

The transition to independent adulthood involves much more than obtaining a job. It involves getting a good job, one that has some long-term prospects, that involves practices and relationships of dignity and integrity. It also involves the establishment of domestic arrangements such as accommodation, relationships with other adults, and it involves involvement in decision-making and participation in political processes.

The views and experiences of the young women in this study reveal that as well as valuing the opportunity to earn a living, many see motherhood as an important part of their lives. These, and other aspects of adult identity, are too frequently relegated to the realm of the 'private', rendering them invisible. Yet, for many young women, the successful transition to independence involves the negotiation of the complexities of adult life that blurs the lines between public and private. As we have commented elsewhere,

> In this sense, the pathways metaphor speaks most centrally to the anticipated futures of young men. It portrays a future in which the main concern is about the qualifications and skills required to gain entry to courses and work places. It says nothing about the ways in which adults balance the other aspects of their lives (Dwyer & Wyn 1993).

These other aspects include the question of how child care relates to employment, and how adults negotiate the fulfilment of domestic tasks in their households. Unless young women and young men have confidence in their ability to manage these aspects of their lives, young women will approach education and training with ambivalence. The silence on the aspects of young people's lives that are deemed to be private, including sexuality, effectively reinforces a traditional division of labour which continues to hamper women's options, and provides young men with an unnecessarily limited perspective on masculinity.

Since the 1980s, educators have noted a bias in the curriculum, including that which emphasises links with 'the world of work' (for example, Poole 1992; Freeland 1992; Anderson 1983; Anderson & Blakers 1983; Wilson & Wyn 1987; Kenway 1993; and Yates 1993). These biases centre around the type of person seen as a worker. 'Workers' devotes their entire lives to their paid employment and study. They do not have responsibility for the maintenance of a domestic unit, in terms of either physical or personal aspects, and therefore need no knowledge about this dimension of life. It is not important. If they are going to get a really good job, they will have excelled in mathematics or physics while at school. In other words, the Australian post-compulsory person looks very much like a traditional male. Although the idea that both men and women have a role to play in the workforce has been accepted, the gender division of labour in the family has been addressed rarely (Yates 1993: 106).

Young people who leave school early are especially disadvantaged in the process of achieving independence and legitimate adult status. In particular, they are inevitably attempting to make the transition without the protection of post-compulsory education and training. This report has illustrated how young women, in particular, remain vulnerable and marginal, many with no real options for improved circumstances in the future. The study serves as a reminder that despite the plethora of programs, policies and initiatives to address gender inequality, it remains a significant issue in the 1990s.

The Victorian Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education (Elliott 1993), and the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97* (Curriculum Corporation 1993) identified priorities and strategies for the establishment of equality of outcomes for all young people in education. These policy initiatives continue to provide a significant base for practices in schools which address the needs of young women.

Practice in schools

Yates (1993) has commented that it is difficult to see the cumulative effects of nearly two decades of educational policy which addresses the needs of girls and young women. This may be because the gains made are frequently in terms of small-scale, local initiatives that have been developed in relation to the specific circumstances that affect schools and their communities. Although policy is very important, it is at the level of school practice that the complexities of gender equity are addressed.

There are three areas in which schools may address their concerns about girls and young women at risk: curriculum, re-entry and monitoring. These are supported in the Report of the Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education to the Minister of Education in Victoria. The following discussion takes up the main issues using examples from current practice. The examples are drawn from a consultation with Victorian teachers who have particular experience in addressing the issues of concern here.

Some of the curriculum developments mentioned have been the outcome of many years of sustained work, which has been undertaken with a commitment to address the needs of young women whose circumstances marginalise them from schooling. This has involved analysis, development, trialling, reflection and evaluation of processes and materials. While some approaches are complex and have developed over a long period of time (especially those which have depended on contacts with community groups and organisations), others are relatively simple. As one teacher commented, "It's not like I have to go and rewrite the total curriculum, or spend thousands of dollars on resources; there is some other small thing that a school has done."

a) Curriculum

The perspectives of young women in this study indicate that **participation and negotiation** are the two key aspects of the curriculum on which they place a high value.

'Adult' practices and negotiation

There is evidence that far from simply taking an instrumental approach to schooling, young people place a high priority on the quality of relationships in school (Wilson & Wyn 1987; Dwyer, Wilson & Woock 1984). The Australian Education Council's consultation for the Review of the National Policy for the Education of Girls (1992) also found that "girls and boys both thrive, however, with less teacher domination and more participative, cooperative and student-controlled approaches to learning" (1992: 85). The finding that early school leavers frequently choose to leave school because they see school as irrelevant to their needs, emphasises the significance of process issues, personal development aspects of the curriculum, and the extent to which young people are able to participate in decision-making. For young women, the failure to acknowledge the realities of adult women's lives, and the distinctive perspectives of women, has the effect of further marginalising them.

The Victorian Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education recommends that within the curriculum,

> ...special attention should be paid to the participation by girls by ensuring that the contributions of women and the different life experiences and skills girls bring to an area of study are valued and reflected in the curriculum. (Elliott 1993: 8)

The implementation of this recommendation requires that teachers negotiate with young women, identifying the strengths they bring to their classroom work.

For example, within the fairly instrumental policy directions of Finn (1991) and Carmichael (1992), there is the possibility that more progressive educational agendas may develop. With this in mind, we draw attention to the more holistic perspective of work that may be brought into the curriculum. This allows us to move beyond the distinction between paid and unpaid work to include an exploration of the implications of all the labour that is expended on becoming an independent adult.

The 'widening' of the curriculum is recommended by The Victorian Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education (Elliott 1993). The Report argues that there need to be changes in what we teach boys as well as girls, emphasising that "this relates to the studies of work, home responsibilities and relationships" (1993: 18). It is suggested that this could be achieved through a "greater emphasis on personal development in primary and secondary schools and complemented by community curriculum for parents where rigid expectations could be challenged" (1993: 18). The Report also draws attention to the fact that having a career does not mean that family life is excluded.

These points have two direct implications for the curriculum.

Content and process of teaching

As the Elliott Report suggests, there is a lot of scope within the personal development area (as a starting point) to foster an awareness amongst students of the adult 'realities' of working (both paid and unpaid). Some strategies for working with these issues have been suggested by Gilbert and Taylor (1991).

In one strategy, they propose that 'popular culture', in the form of television soap operas, popular magazines and romance books is a useful starting point for encouraging young people - and particularly girls - to begin to unravel the 'myths' and 'realities' about our society. They use the term 'deconstruction' to discuss the process of assisting students to become critical and conscious of how their own lives and those of their family and community relate to the images and models presented through various media. Another strategy involves the collection and publication of oral histories to document the types of work women and men in the local community do, and how they balance their multiple responsibilities.

Work experience also provides an opportunity to bring closer links between the classroom and the world beyond school. The experience of one Melbourne inner city school provides an illustration of this. The school instituted an Affirmative Action and Training Group of staff who structured the links between students (especially young women) and the employers who would provide work experience. These links, in turn, had an effect on the views of the employers. One of the teachers involved commented that the employers have come to realise that the girls are 'dedicated, committed'.

In this school, the work education program involved all year 10 students. The process for negotiating a work experience placement requires students to answer job advertisements which the careers teacher has placed in the school's student newspaper. Students send in applications containing a resume of their case. Students are also required to talk with the careers teacher by telephone to arrange an interview.

The structuring of this work experience has the advantage of giving students an insight into the formal processes which are integral to obtaining a job. It also ensures that students who have limited personal connections which they could use to organise a work education placement for themselves are not disadvantaged.

The attention to assisting students to negotiate the formal and practical aspects associated with participation in the workforce is significant. A teacher working with young people in the west of Melbourne commented that learning the skills to make their way about new parts of the city with confidence was an important aspect of work education in itself. She commented that the young people at her school preferred to work 'locally' so she would particularly encourage them to 'go over the bridge to the city'. She added:

> In Year 7 we were getting them on and off trains and buying tickets and learning how to approach the box office. You can't assume that kids know about those sort of things. Some of our girls - they were especially scared of their placement. We had to actually take them through it - had to show them where to catch the train.

Both work experience and careers education provide an opportunity within the curriculum to take up questions about how adults manage their responsibilities for paid and unpaid work, and the avenues open to women to pursue options of their choice.

Student welfare

The second area of the curriculum associated with 'the world beyond school' is that of student welfare. There is a tradition in this area for taking a measure of responsibility to be informed about the circumstances of students' lives and to be in touch with the nature of the students in the school and their needs. Creating a space for welfare concerns or pastoral care within the crowded curriculum is a complex issue. However as one teacher commented, the workload can be shared through the creation of a 'welfare team', comprising student welfare coordinators and other support services within the school, together with area coordinators. Members of welfare teams would have defined areas of responsibility for groups of students, and would try to be informed about their circumstances, where they spend their time, where to contact them.

The formal curriculum can often be structured to provide a space for student welfare concerns. For example, one school has added an English period to the timetable at Years 11 and 12 specifically to allow the English teacher to have a weekly home group session with students in order to address welfare issues.

Both of the above dimensions are important to create a school environment in which young women can participate actively, and which they feel will take account of their needs.

However, despite such measures, a proportion of young women will continue to leave school early. For this group, the possibility of re-entering secondary school to complete their post compulsory education offers a crucial pathway to escape the cycle of dead end jobs, poor working conditions and periods of dependence on income support.

b) Re-entry

It is likely that a significant group of young people will continue to leave school early. Their opportunities are greatly enhanced if it is possible for them to have access to post-compulsory secondary education through re-entry programs which are designed to cater for older students. There are particular issues which relate to young women who are likely to be re-entering school in less 'supported' circumstances than young men. Some have established a new family (partner and child) which involves considerable responsibilities for others. The Victorian Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education (Elliott 1993) recommends that guidelines and strategies need to be built into existing policies and practices in relation to,

> ... the impact of family circumstances on access to education, for example, where girls are married at an early age, or become pregnant and have children. (1993: 14)

Re-entry to secondary school requires the school to take account of a very wide range of students with different needs. For example, older students who have spent a number of years away from school before re-entering are seen by their teachers as having a positive perspective on the importance of education. As one teacher commented, "the older ones have had time to work out what they are doing and why." Older students are also more likely to have resources to support their return to school, and also may have had time to develop an identifiable support system through friends and family relationships. On the other hand, younger students returning to school may be more likely to need the support of the school. In the case of one school in a rural community, the school found it necessary to institute a number of support measures. It assisted students in obtaining accommodation; it set up a financial system within the local community so that students could get a loan if their Austudy hadn't come through; a grant was also set aside for the library to buy books to put on loan for students who could not individually afford to buy them.

Some young women face additional constraints. For example, one teacher pointed out that a teenage mother may face added pressures in attempting to study. She commented:

> Having a sick child is a problem whether you are old or young, in that sense of having to take time out from school, but the stories I have heard about young women trying to go back to do VCE when they have a small child! They can organise the day to have their child cared for, but there is the expectation that they might do four hours of homework at night as well.

The needs of re-entry students - for a recognition of their circumstances and the provision of support for groups who would otherwise be marginalised - are no different to those of other students. Our evidence suggests that the very issues that are important in developing a successful re-entry program are also crucial in creating a school environment in which all young women will feel they can participate, and which therefore provides a positive alternative to leaving early.

c) Monitoring

One of the most significant activities for schools to undertake is to inform themselves and their students about the post-school experiences of their young people. Some form of monitoring of the outcomes for exit students provides the school and its current students with a more accurate picture of the options facing early school leavers.

The Victorian Working Party on Opportunities for Girls in Education (Elliott 1993) acknowledges that a research base is essential for the development of policies and practices. It suggests

> the tracking of individual students through their school and post-school career. (1993: 17)

Monitoring the post-school destinations of students provides schools with important information about their students. The teachers we consulted felt that monitoring was valuable because

> teachers need to know their students, to know where they're going, whether they get there, and to own part of that experience. You can't actually do the work for them, but you can do everything else to help them maximise their chances of achieving their goals.

Teachers felt that monitoring of students' outcomes provides the school with useful feedback for curriculum planning.

In a study of schools around Australia (Dwyer, 1993), the Youth Research Centre found that many of the schools were unaware of the number of young people who took up options at TAFE rather than attempting to go to university after completing Year 12, and of the extent to which the subject choices and types of jobs taken up were stereotyped according to gender. This information would have placed the schools in a more informed position and enabled them to orient their curriculum planning and careers advice to reflect students' preferences for less 'academic' pathways, and to question the stereotyped choice of job destinations.

Monitoring student outcomes involves setting up a system that can be maintained over time. Although it would be desirable to be able to monitor students' destinations over a period of 12 months or more after leaving school, it is acknowledged that this would be difficult to achieve. However, monitoring the immediate post-school destinations of students who leave provides significant information about the effects of local labour markets, about the effectiveness of course and career advice and about the extent to which the school is 'in touch' with the circumstances students face when they leave school.

Conclusion

The stories in this report of the young women who left school early reflect both courage and struggle. For them, even more than their male counterparts, the decision to leave school early sets them on a process in which the pursuit of their goal to achieve independence as young adults is fragmented. This group of young people are seriously at risk of being dispossessed of a future in which they have security. The overwhelming evidence from the experiences of the young women in this study is that although they made 'choices', their decisions were affected by a process of marginalisation from school, which, in many cases, left early leaving as the only option that they could see available to them.

Although completing secondary education does not necessarily mean that young people will gain employment, it does make it easier to take up opportunities for further education and training which will ultimately help them to establish a 'pathway' towards independence.

To be effective in the future, our schools need to ensure that the curriculum, in its widest sense, provides for all girls and young women. It is now a reality that the post compulsory years of school must provide an educational milieu for a much more diverse group than the traditional group for whom school completion is a 'university track'. Those who leave early need to leave informed about the local labour market, about forms of income support, and about their opportunities to undertake further education or training. Most important is an invitation to re-enter. Without this attention to school curricula, some groups of young women will continue to be at risk of becoming marginalised in the process of establishing themselves as adults.

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Working Paper 9:	**Getting a Life: Pathways and Early School Leavers** (Elizabeth Holden, October 1992)
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Youth Research Centre

The Youth Research Centre is located within the Institute of Education at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the YRC are to:

- conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a state, national and international focus;
- assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
- develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector's research needs;
- facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
- support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
- enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people's lives.

Youth Research Centre Activities

The YRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main YRC activities are:

- undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
- providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
- assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

YRC activities involve:

- undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
- providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
- enabling academics to participate in established YRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
- maintaining a youth sector resource library;
- publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
- conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.

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